

Remarks of
Ronald N. Langston, National Director
Minority Business Development Agency
U.S. Department of Commerce

On the Occasion of the

Grand Opening
of the
Louisiana Minority Business Opportunity Center

New Orleans, Louisiana
November 14, 2006

(Revised 11-30-06)

Good morning. I bring warm greetings on behalf of the **President of the United States** and the **Secretary of Commerce, Carlos M. Gutierrez.**

Mayor Nagin, Mayor Holden and other distinguished guests, I am particularly honored to share with you today's occasion of opening the **Louisiana Minority Business Opportunity Center.**

Secretary Gutierrez has visited the region many times. He made a pledge to both of you and to the citizens of Louisiana the **Bush Administration** and the **U.S.**

Department of Commerce would be here on the ground with you until the last day of the Administration.

Since last fall, the MBDA has assisted over 340 displaced minority firms; assisted approximately 1,100 MBEs with the identification of procurement opportunities; conducted education and outreach activities reaching more than 4,000 MBEs; and vetted nearly 1,200 firms as viable MBEs with the capacity to participate in the rebuilding of New Orleans.

MBDA has also facilitated the award of over \$25 million in contracts to minority-owned firms. Two of these firms, Sai Sai Trucking and SEMA Inc., are African American-owned firms based in New Orleans.

Today's occasion brings to reality the MBDA's goal to have a funded center in Louisiana.

Our presence today in Louisiana is part of a strategic effort to engage and **stimulate the growth and expansion of Minority Business Enterprise in the Gulf.**

This strategy includes bringing medium and large-size minority-owned firms from across the nation to link with local minority business firms in the Gulf for the purpose of forming joint ventures and successfully competing for multi-million dollar contracts!

We have already conducted two ***Business-to-Business Forums*** this past summer-- one here in New Orleans and another in Biloxi, Mississippi. At both events, we had approximately **400 businesses in attendance--** with half of those being from around the country!

These forums followed the **Secretary's Investment Mission** to Louisiana and Mississippi to promote the **GO Zone tax incentives**. This effort has already produced a reinvestment of more than **\$100 million by Home Depot** and an **additional \$150 million by Shell**.

The MBDA also hosted its National Conference in New Orleans to expose its network of forty minority business centers to spread the message: **New Orleans and the Gulf Coast are open for business**.

Today, as we open the **Louisiana Minority Business Opportunity Center**, I want to emphasize the primary mission of the MBDA in the Gulf is to pursue procurement contracts and financial transactions for Minority Business Enterprises.

The role and function of the Louisiana MBOC¹ will be to **provide brokering services and assistance** to MBEs that (a) generate \$500,000 or more in annual gross revenues; (b) are capable of creating significant employment and long-term economic impact (commonly referred to as “rapid growth-potential” MBEs); or (c) have been displaced from Louisiana due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The MBOC will provide access to buyers of goods and services and procurement and financing opportunities within the public and private sectors. In addition, the MBOC will assist clients by **identifying, matching and fostering strategic partners and joint ventures** with firms outside of the designated service area in order to build client capacity.

¹ The MBOC program is federally funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA). Each is operated with the mission to assist corporations, universities and government agencies in developing business opportunities with certified MBEs. The MBOCs address MBE issues and provide assistance to facilitate their success and growth. The ultimate goal is to convert “contacts into contracts.”

Supporting the Louisiana MBOC is a volunteer advisory committee that will assist with implementing the program requirements and providing contract and financing opportunities to MBEs. So, on behalf of **MBDA** and the **Department of Commerce**, let me say “thank you” to those strategic partners who are demonstrating their belief in **New Orleans**, in **Louisiana** and in the **Minority Business Enterprise community**.

Let me be clear, the **local Minority Business Enterprise community** will need the assistance of the **City of New Orleans**, **Baton Rouge** and the **State of Louisiana** to assist **MBDA** and its **new Center** with identifying and forecasting contract opportunities in the Gulf and in the local parishes.

We are confident we have identified a strong nucleus of qualified and ready-to-work minority business contractors

and entrepreneurs who can “do the job” with high quality and cost efficiencies on behalf of the citizens of Louisiana.

I want to thank **Mayor Nagin, Mayor Holden** and your respective offices and staff for their hard work in coordinating and assisting the **Minority Business Development Agency**. We have had the pleasure of meeting a representative cross-section of the New Orleans and Baton Rouge communities. Together, we have labored to identify solutions and to assist minority businesses who were scattered across America to regroup and re-emerge.

Mayor Holden, I especially want to recognize **Mr. Williams** of your office for his assistance and dedication to bringing the **Louisiana Minority Business Opportunity Center** to fruition.

Rebuilding is going to take time, and a lot of hard work. I'm confident, however, with the support of the **City of New Orleans**, the **City of Baton Rouge** and all our partners, **Louisiana** and the Gulf region will be back stronger than ever before.

I pledge to you **Mayor Nagin**, **Mayor Holden** and the **citizens of Louisiana**, every ounce of my energy to ensure the MBDA is a good partner and steward in the great and noble cause.

Thank you for being here. Let's get to work!